The Basic Archives Workshop: A Partnership Between Kentucky Community Organizations and University of Kentucky Libraries

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• **Introduction:**
  - Ruth and Sarah introduction
  - We are part of a team of archivists and librarians that have held a series of 4 basic archives workshops for community organizations over the past 2.5 years. This morning, we’re going to talk about our experience holding this workshop and supporting the archival activities of these organizations.
Overview of presentation

Sarah Explain how we sat down to plan the presentation and it turned into a long discussion / riffing session about practical and conceptual lessons we’ve learned from holding the workshops. We were so energized by the discussion that we hope to recreate it as part of the Liberated Archives Forum. The session is going to start in a more structured way while we explain the background to the workshop and attendees, but later it will transition to a more informal discussion session, although there are a few points we definitely want to touch upon.

Ruth We will start with an overview of the workshop and then have about 35 minutes minutes for a deeper exploration of the workshop with these guiding questions:

- Why hold a community archives workshop?
- What needs were addressed?
- What were the challenges? Successes?
- What next?

Ruth We recently visited with and interviewed three workshop
attendees and for each of these topics, we’ll splice in their comments so their thoughts can be represented even though they are unable to attend today.

- Sarah We may have to cut some conversations short, but we want to make sure we address each of these topics and have time to include the attendees’ comments.
- Sarah We will then save 10 minutes or so for additional questions, comments, and discussion
The Basic Archives Workshop

3-3.5 hours,
Morning, can’t take full day off work
Workshop Objectives

- Understand the historical value of organizational records
- Understand basic selection, preservation, inventory, access, and outreach activities on historical records

- Objectives (see slide)
Instructors: 7 archivists from SCRC organize and present these workshops, instructors were from a variety of areas within SCRC
- University Archivist + University Records Manager
- Education Archivist
- Learning Lab Manager
- Collections Management Archivist
- Director of Digital Services
- Special Collections Librarian/African American Studies Academic Liaison

The workshop was divided up into subsections based on topic and after each mini session there would be a Q&A so that attendees could ask questions about specific challenges they were facing with their records. This was really interesting for us to hear about their challenges and questions.
Workshop Topics

1. Historical value of records
Workshop Topics

2. Appraisal & selection

Selecting what to keep and what to discard

Value of content

- Primary value: administrative, fiscal, legal (informational)
- Secondary value: strategic, cultural, and historical (evidential)

Costs of keeping and providing access

- Money
- Space
- Time
- Relationships/support
Workshop Topics

3. Inventory

Levels of inventory
Smaller groups or files or items:
Workshop Topics

4. Preservation: physical and digital

Where to store paper records?

- Air conditioned and heated atmosphere
- Purchase humidity temperature sensor
- 35-50% RH, 35-65°F
- Avoid direct sun or light exposure
- Employ fire resistant environment
- Provide a secure and clean area
- Utilize metal cabinets or sturdy shelving
Workshop Topics

5. Access, outreach, SCRC research basics

Doing your own research
Archives Workshop: Topics

6. Digitization/online access

How? | Format

- Preserve
- Share
- Search
Tour of Special Collections
Q&A throughout!
Handouts!: We include a variety of handouts for attendees to reference after the workshop. These include brochures from SAA about organizational records, best practices and tip sheets, and a list of supplies companies.

- SAA handout
- Records Schedules examples
- Tips for digitization and working with digital files
- SCRC resources
- Inventory examples
- Supplies com
- Preservation tips
Assessment
Assessment

I have a basic knowledge of:

- Value
- Selection
- Inventory
- Preservation
- Digital archiving
- Provide access
- Digitization

- Assessment (Ruth)
  - For workshops (except November 2015): pre- and post-workshop survey (n varied from 4 to 13)
Assessment

2016 March Basic Archives Workshop survey results (average)

June 2016 Basic Archives Workshop survey results (average)

2017 March Basic Archives Workshop survey results (average)
Workshop Attendees
Attendees (Ruth)
  ○ General overview: organizations represented, experience levels, “lone arrangers”
  ○ Numbers have varied from 4 to 15. Total = 33. Best attendance, March 2016
Attendees

- Churches:
  - First African Baptist, Main Street Baptist, Shilo Missionary Baptist

- Cultural/historical organizations:
  - Lyric Theatre, Mary Todd Lincoln House, Lexington History Museum, Waveland State Historic Site

- Economic/social development organizations

(Ruth)
- Expanded from Lexington African American church clerks to broader participation (one individual sometimes represented multiple organizations)
Attendees

- School/Education organizations
  - Lincoln Foundation, Henry clay High School, Tates Creek Public Library, Shelby County Public Library
- Genealogy groups
  - African American Genealogical Group of KY, KY Genealogy Society, U ID yoU identify local African American Friends and Family Facebook page

(Ruth)
Opened December 1948 and closed in 1963. Movie theatre and concert hall in segregated Black neighborhood on northeast side of Lexington. Anchor of Black small business district. Sat empty and derelict for 53 years, until reopened as Lyric Theatre and Cultural Arts Center in October 2010. Planning for renovation and reopening began in the early 1990s. Renovation expanded physical size to 1200 feet, added a gallery and multipurpose room. Mission is “to preserve, promote, present, and celebrate diverse cultures with a special emphasis on African American cultural heritage through outside presentations of the highest quality, educational programming, and outreach, film, and opportunities for community inclusion.”

At the time of the interview in late June 2017, Ashley C. Smith was the Lyric’s first-ever Development Coordinator, responsible for creating and implementing development and fundraising strategies, including different ways to break down barriers for non-traditional donors or donors from marginalized groups (especially the predominantly African American folks that live in the East End neighborhood) to contribute to support the Lyric. And, to develop strategies to ensure that the neighborhood benefits economically from the Lyric.

Ashley is a Kentucky native and graduated from UK with a degree in sociology. She had been working at the Lyric since March 2015. Starting July 11, she is now
Director of Education and Governmental Affairs for The Fayette Alliance, a community alliance working on promoting sustainable growth in Lexington.

There are practically no surviving documents and very few photographs about the Lyric from 1948-1963.
First African Baptist Church was founded around 1790, the first African Baptist congregation West of the Allegheny Mountains. The church was formerly located just to the west of the East End neighborhood of Lexington on Short and Dewees Streets, but in 1983 had the opportunity to buy the lot where the former Black high school, Douglass High School, was, on the northwest side of town. About 200 to 250 people attend weekly church services, but many more are on the member roles. The mission of the church is to be “The Church in the Community for the Heart of the Community.”

Historical materials include windows, the baptismal mural, and artifacts from the old church building, some of which were incorporated into the new church building or are on display in the Legacy Room organized by Phaon. Key records for the church include membership cards and lists and church bulletins. There are also Bibles, photographs and postcards, scrapbooks, CDs and videos of church services and other church activities. Earliest dates are around 1880s.

Phaon Patton has been involved with First African since birth. Her parents were members. She’s been the church clerk and secretary since 2001 and her work includes preparing the church bulletins every week, fielding telephone calls, keeping QuickBooks up-to-date, issuing checks, and maintaining accurate membership information.
Edith Turley, Shiloh Baptist Church

Shiloh Baptist Church was founded in 1869. The church was formerly in the East End neighborhood of Lexington on Thomas Street. In 1963, they moved slightly west and still in downtown Lexington on Fifth and Elm Tree. There are about 1,800 members and 400-450 attend the two weekly Sunday services. The purpose of the church is to “Transform the world through Jesus as we love God and others.”

Key records for the church include membership information in a variety of formats and funeral bulletins. There are also photographs, newsletters, and Bibles.

Edith Turley has been a member of Shiloh Baptist for 50 years. She started attending, then teaching Sunday School to children and teenagers. She has been church clerk since 2009, and is also the pastor’s secretary and the church administrative assistant.
Topic 1: Why would a university research library hold a basic archives workshop?
Why?

● **Ruth** Background of how the workshop came to be (Yvonne + Ruth). I’d worked with Yvonne Giles, expert in Lexington African American history, and had been looking for an opportunity to move archives out of the walls of our building. Yvonne approached me in early fall 2015 about doing a workshop for church clerks. She had identified both a need and an interest.

● **Sarah** I’m going to play several **clips** from Edith, Phaon, and Ashley about why they attended the workshop and their expectations so you can hear it in their own words. (**sound clips**)
Delphine called me and said “Did you know there was going to be a workshop?” and I said “No...for church clerks?” And she said “Yes.” So that was that was very, very important to me because I have been going to Louisville, KY under the Southern Kentucky Baptists, and there was like 100 people... but it was solely for church clerks and secretaries; they did not explain to you about archiving anything. - Edith Turley
Well, I was hoping to get some information on how to display the material, and you all did give me some of that information, sorting the material, just getting organized and being able to let people know what you have and what you don’t have because eventually with the way the world is going now and the internet and websites, you need to put that information out there to let people know what you have but then ...
... you need to have somebody on site to take calls and schedule appointments. ... I don’t know if the church is ready for displaying, people coming in... I’m not sure about that. It may come but I don’t think we’re ready right now. First we have to get it all organized. - Phaon Patton
Why?

Fortunately, we’ve had some good workers in the history area in our church. They saved a lot of stuff, they just didn’t know what to do with it after they saved it because every year we get stuff out and put it up... That’s one of the reasons why I went to the workshop in order to get an idea how to display, what to keep, what not to keep, how to organize, and then let people know what you have. We’ve got bulletins back since we came here,
I don’t know what to do with those, some are important, some aren’t. They’re important to somebody who’s been at the church and you recognize the names of the sick and shut in and they’re gone now, but everybody, that doesn’t mean anything to.... And then you have to decide which form to save them in... do you put them in plastic sleeves, do you put them in folders...?” - Phaon Patton
The fact that we have no historic records, that was the main motivator. So when I arrived in 2015, we had a failed attempt [with] Dr. Doug Boyd to get some oral histories captured and there were so many obstacles and I just kept at it, trying to figure out, is there another angle? And this is still an ongoing process. We're still a year after this archival workshop, the small historic context that I have been able to glean has come from the Kentucky
Why?

African American Encyclopedia, local historian Miss Yvonne Giles, there was a report constructed ... in the early 90s ... [about] a bid to the city of Lexington to ... trying to get the building up and going since the 80s and there were so many obstacles. And from that document, which is about 45 pages, I was able to learn that on December 10, 1948, when we opened, the first movie that was screened here was the River Lady.
Why?

So taking those types of resources and squeezing them like an almost dry rag, and it's been able to produce a timeline downstairs, ... an inter-generational exhibit, so since we are so lacking, since the original management that led the facility from 1948-1963 we just don't know where those documents are. There's this loss, there's this hole in our soul that we're trying to search [for] those missing pieces.
Why?

There are people in the community who have the oral histories, it’s just building the trust, ... and getting them to open up and share, so we've thought about having archival pop ups here where we just scan and print on site, we have such a small staff, and that's why we look to entities such as Special Collections and the archivists and the Library. So the motivating point is all these missing pieces. - Ashley Smith
I was immediately excited after hanging up from talking with Yvonne: This is something we can do, an initiative that is manageable amongst our other responsibilities and interests. Why?: Repeatable, large strong team. I sent an e-mail to SC asking for volunteers, and got a group together.
Ruth: Provides an opportunity to build relationships across Lexington and central Kentucky, to take archives (or archival practice) out of the walls of SC and into the community (we’ve been invited)
  ○ UK has not historically prioritized relationships with these groups
  ○ Opens the door to opportunities for future collaboration because we have a shared interest in long term preservation of and access to historical records, regardless of where those records are housed today

Sarah: Quote from Ashley about relationships
I’m a very process oriented person so you took me through a process. And it was hand holding for dummies, archives for dummies. And it was fun to also meet the other workshop attendees because I’ve developed relationships with other agencies because of meeting them there, so thank you for that. It was just coming in and there was so much of “What if?” and I think a lot of times my work has been laying the ground so someone...
behind me can lay the seed and someone behind them can water it so again, going back to that trust question, and now sitting in the workshop... here’s what we have to do. Here is the approach that we can take, because it’s a lot of community engagement. -Ashley Smith
Sarah We also saw this as a way to empower organizations to make informed decisions about managing their records. This is an extension of the post-custodial theory of archives. We know there are organizations and individuals who are certainly capable of maintaining their own archive, so it's a way for us to - again - build relationships with these organizations to show that we recognize the importance of their records and value those records and want to support this work even if the records are not being donated to our repository. This is important to us and we're seeing this across the entire archives professional in general over the past few years.
Sarah Q: Is this something you or your repository would be interested in doing? Is anyone else doing anything similar?
Topic 2: What are the challenges for workshop instructors and attendees? Q. to audience: What kinds of challenges do you think there would be in holding a basic archives workshop? *Sarah*

*Sarah:* We have some clips of Phaon talking about her challenges in attending the workshops. *(play clips)*
Why?

I get the feeling that some people that work at the church or keep up with the history, they may have full time jobs, whereas I don’t, so I can float in and out because this is my full time job and I love what I do. - Phaon Patton
[Ruth’s question]

Yeah... I was open to it. I think just the parking and manoeuvring is the biggest thing...

[Ruth’s question]

... I enjoyed it. And I know Reinette [Jones].. and I know you all now... it’s all good. - Phaon Patton
Is talking about archives a barrier or unifier?  

- As we all know, it’s often difficult to talk about archives. We were concerned we were going to have a conversation about an already difficult topic of archives with the underlying layer of privilege (with the instructors employed by a well-funded institution, plus other levels of privilege).
- We thought we were going to have to convince people of the value of their records, but this ended up not being a problem at all. We found that we instead have the interest and even love of archives in common. This shared goal helped us come together and discuss archival practices and peers and colleagues, as people who understand the value of historic records.
- It was similar to a “train the trainer” situation-- we helped attendees feel more confident in their knowledge of archival practices so they could go back to their organizations and communicate the importance of their records to the other members.
- So overall, there was much less constrain and distrust between attendees and workshop instructors. In the large spectrum of the general population, UK archivists and the workshop attendees were much closer together than we anticipated.
Sarah: Edith Turley hints at this environment in this clip.
Differences of privilege Sarah

- But at the same time, we understand that that is our perspective as the workshop leaders. We were and are aware of the differences of privilege: We are both white, cisgender, and straight; We are well paid and work for a relatively well-funded institution of power in the community that has often and is still using its power in an arguably non-inclusive way.

- We are fortunate to have Reinette Jones to start these conversations. She has paved the way as one of the few black librarians at UK and is active in Lexington's LGBTQIA community. She is also very supportive of the Libraries and our mission and goals. Her work has been an important if not critical bridge for us and our work and for people in the community.

- We did learn that there are multiple levels of power dynamics at play. There’s the obvious ones we’ve already mentioned, but it came out through the interviews that the organizations have their own power dynamics at play within their communities. Each person we
interviewed is based at an institution of power, prestige, and relative wealth among the community they serve. This means that there may be levels of distrust or hesitancy in their relationships. This was something we had not considered before talking one-on-one to the attendees.

- Ashley Smith talks about this issue in her interview. *(play clip)*
There’s something interesting about Lexington that is very mistrusting of outsiders... I’m born and raised here but my family is originally from Western Kentucky so I don’t have a multigeneration home place in Lexington either, so people are always like “So where are you from?” We just got off on the wrong foot as an organization when we reopened, it was a very polarising, it was a very racialized issue, this was a segregated
facility in its original day, people were very concerned... are they only going to have Black things there? In my mind I’m like: What is the issue if we were to only to have Black things in a space, in a town that does not have an equal balance of narratives being shared?... So we were able to hire on an executive director, who was from California- didn’t come from the community and that already was on the wrong foot.
The leadership domino effect continued and the strained relationships from decisions that were made by early boards. So now stepping into a situation, a culture two years ago and immediately recognizing the tension of I’m supposed to go and ask for money, you all have made my life so, so easy, wink-wink, air quotes, and it’s been the opportunities to sit around tables and have hard conversations with people as to why they don’t feel...
welcome here, why they felt shut out because they couldn’t afford to rent. So we’ve made adjustments to the rentals, we have pay what you can theatrical performances so people can set their own economy if they are unable to pay they can come in with no question asked, so the trust is still being rebuilt, they usually say it takes a neighbor or an activist ...ten years, we’ve only been reopen for seven. - Ashley Smith
I noticed it with my organization and then UK’s history with African American population in Lexington... Memorial Coliseum was Adamstown. There was a whole thriving African American community there. You see it with Rupp Arena. There are thorns still very, very stuck and prickles in people’s skin when it comes to UK, so I think both of our agencies have that Venn diagram overlap in the middle where we know you have to
Why?

recognize that is detrimental and take the steps to rebuild and reconcile. That’s another reason why I feel it's important for UK to participate in these initiatives of we’ve not always heard your voice, we’ve not always taken the time but now is an opportunity for us to sit across a table with you and look at some very precious pictures of people who mean the world to you and help you memorialize that. - Ashley Smith
If you were going to do a basic archives workshop, which communities would you reach out too?

Is that appropriate or “enough”? Would you be able to sustain the relationship?  

- If you were going to do a basic archives workshop, which communities would you reach out too? Is that appropriate or “enough”? Would you be able to sustain the relationship?  

   Ruth
Ruth

- Most of the attendees and all of those we interviewed are women of color who represent communities of color, some of which are religious organizations.

- This brings up the **differences between attendees**, which is not something we thought through before or during the workshops. We aim for these workshops to be as welcoming and low barrier as possible, but what if the attendees represent groups that are not traditionally inclusive of other attendees? Or other groups that we are trying to reach? (Example, Baptist churches + LGBTQIA communities / women)

- This was the case for one of our workshops, and there were no indicators that there was hostility or discomfort, but that’s from *our perspective* and we were mightily distracted by leading the workshop!

- But it begs the question: **Does a mutual respect and understanding that all of our records are valuable and the eagerness to learn more about archival practices override potential conflict?** (We
don’t know for sure.) In a sense, isn’t this bubble of unbiasedness something that we try to cultivate as archivist in our collecting work? Don’t we preserve records that document all sectors of the population?
But that brings up the question: **What is the difference between support and collecting?** Support is sharing knowledge; collecting involves transfer of ownership. Because workshop leaders are not responsible for stewardship of the attendees’ records (or attendees of each other's records), this decreases levels of distrust. Ownership is not a question in these discussions. One's opinion and ethics don’t come into play.

- **BUT:** **What if KKK came to us and wanted to attend?** If we allow them to attend, doesn’t that validate them as a viable entity equal to the other organizations being represented at the workshop? (Example of Indiana women collecting women in KKK oral histories) Would it not be better to collect their records rather than support them in any way?

- So, **where would the line be drawn?** Ruth suggested “Are these organizations representing stances that are systemically violent or disruptive? Or do they aim at silencing groups of people based on identity, whether it be women, people of color, non-heterosexual, non-believers?” But isn’t this all subjective? What does “violent or
disruptive” mean to a member of a hate group?

- During our workshops, we spend 15 minutes on **appraisal and value** of records. We as archivists generally believe that historical records in and of themselves are equal in value (although some are prioritized over others because of the rarity of the subject matter or perspective of the creator?) Kentucky state records schedule focuses on **format** not **content**, so in theory you don’t “need” to know the content of the records, but of course in practice you do. Our workshops focus on practices and we aim the subjectivity on practice. We are assuming attendees have similar formats and need to do the same functions.
What next?
Questions we’re mulling over: *Ruth*

1. Should the workshop be expanded by
   a. Topics - personal papers, other needs regarding organizational records
What next?

- Other topics?
- Other audiences?

Audience - other organizations, those with personal collections
What else can we do? How will these potential collaborations manifest?
How much can we responsibly handle?

What next?

- Other topics?
- Other audiences?
- What else can we do?
- How much can we handle?
What questions or comments do you (audience) have?
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